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ABSTRACT

The William Perry model of learning is directly parallel to what has been learned about writing processes. He observed that the student is essentially a dualist who sees everything as right or wrong. This stance of absolute acceptance wavers when the student encounters varieties of or disagreements among truths, thus gradually evolving into the cognitive position of "relativism." Two correctives to this scheme help make its applicability to remedial writing more evident. The first is the suggestion that the Perry scheme also operates on a horizontal axis and that the process of inventing the self (or personna) in writing is constantly recursive. The other is the suggestion of the necessity of recursiveness to the learning process. Remedial students tend to be dualists about their writing skills, substituting self-consciousness for self-awareness. Central to the pedagogy of the author's remedial writing classes at Agnes Scott College is the students' shift from negative and dualistic notions about writing to a positive and relativistic awareness of writing processes. After writing spontaneously on what they perceive to be their writing problems, students complete a protocol analysis on previous writing experiences in order to set goals and objectives. They then learn writing strategies such as free writing, revision, and purpose and audience considerations. This self-awareness of writing processes creates a more positive attitude toward writing, and gives students a tool for learning and developing intellectual maturity in other areas. (HTH)

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Developing Self-Awareness about Writing Processes:

The Perry Model and the Remedial Writer

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CS 208 515

I must begin with a disclaimer which I hope you will allow; namely, that "self-consciousness" about writing processes is the negative dimension of the value which we are addressing in this panel which should more precisely be named "self-awareness of writing processes." Indeed, this distinction is at the center of my paper today.

Far too many of our students come to us self-conscious about their inability to write. And many of our teaching methods sustain their sense of failure. Such has been my experience with writers at all levels, but most acutely I have found it true of students who are inexperienced writers and who have been placed in remedial classes following a failure to achieve normative competency in writing.

Before such students can learn to write well, they must overcome the negative attitude toward their writing which they bear almost as battle scars ("I am not very confident in what I write. . . . If I have to write . . . I think I'm going to mess up no matter what I do"). In the William Perry model, Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years, learning is described as a multi-phased and recursive sequence. Much of Perry's theory about learning is directly parallel to what we have come to understand about writing processes; indeed, it may provide a pedagogical theory for our practice. The Perry scheme uses the metaphor of 'tabula rasa" to describe that cognitive position in which the student willingly accepts the authority of the professor, the text, and the facts of knowledge; the student is essentially a dualist who sees everything as right or wrong. However, this stance of absolute acceptance wavers when the student encounters varieties of the truth, even disagreements among

truths, and thus it gradually evolves into the cognitive position of "relativism." Eventually this stage becomes further qualified when students realize that some interpretations are more valid than others, so that multiple points of view must be evaluated for their basis of support. Gradually, this position matures to recognition that knowledge has a method of applying theory tested by validation (i.e., that theories are not themselves truth but rather metaphors with which to interpret experience; also that validation of these theories must be made with each application and particular context.) Finally, the student may realize that commitment to a point of view must be made uniquely by himself, for the situation, and that the consequences of commitment are also his. The highest level of cognitive maturity is reached when the student can be "whole-hearted while tentative, fight for values yet respect others, believe deepest values to be right, yet be ready to learn" (Larry Copes, The Perry Development Scheme: A Synopsis).

Perry's scheme is essentially vertical; it is a developmental pattern which he derived in description of the maturation sequences he observed in Harvard College students. Two correctives to the scheme may make its applicability to remedial students more self-evident. One is offered by Wayne Booth ("Writing as the Creation of a Self--Implications for Teaching," 1983) who suggests that the Perry scheme also operates in an horizontal axis and that the process of inventing the self (or personna) in writing is constantly recursive. Ann Berthoff ("Writing to Make Meaning," 1983) also suggests the necessity of recursiveness to the learning process; she argues that rather than a developmental analogue, one needs to consider meaning as an unfolding Japanese flower of wood which expands in water as does

meaning within expanding social contexts. Both note that higher order reasoning is not only sequential; at all stages we increase our capacity to understand, and as such, we are re-making ourselves. That the patterns of the learning process are horizontal and recursive is evident to any writer; with each project one discovers that the task of making meaning is re-begun with each effort to write, and that it is a recursive process of discovery.

These correctives make it possible to demonstrate the applicability of the Perry model to the remedial writing classroom. Rest assured, I will make no claims that remedial students are able to reach the heighth of intellectual maturity in a single bound! However, the Perry model has made me more aware of the vulnerability that is involved when a student moves from one position of cognitive maturity to another. This in turn has helped me to design a series of experiences which transform insecure writers into what Berthoff calls "makers of meaning"--in control of their thoughts through writing. Once liberated from the fear of failure these students become able to take risks, to weigh their ideas critically, and to approach their thinking dialectically. Through the writing process, these students model the pattern of higher order reasoning.

Remedial students tend to be dualists about their writing skills; because the teachers are always right, the students feel that they will always be wrong. ("When I think about writing a paper, I usually think that it's going to be another late night and it's going to be another bad grade.") It is a wonder that we have staved off rebellion for so long, but the power of D-, CS. RTS, and frag. in the debasement of self-confidence is not to be underestimated. Following Shaughnessy's lead, the pedagogical fal-

lacies of mere correctness as a measure of writing competency have been examined in substantial depth. Quite aside from the self-defeatism which is created (itself a ready-made excuse for failure), this perception of writing prevents the student from taking responsibility for his own learning. The methods which stressed correctness and conformity over self-expression and analytical thinking begat a student who remained a dualist in his dependency on the teacher to supply the motive for writing, the model for writing, and the standard of judgment.

My students come into a remedial section of a year-long freshman course on literature and composition having failed the first quarter of this three-quarter/sequenced course. Our intensive remedial section is intended to 'make-up' what was not achieved toward minimal competency and at the same time continue the study of literature. Branded as failures, these students enter the course with little idea of how they can improve although all are willing to have another chance to develop the writing skills that they need. Their reasons for failure are diverse: inability, inexperience, or prodigious procrastination.

After assuring the class that the remedial section demonstrates the College's faith in their ability to succeed, I immediately ask them to write. Modifying Peter Elbow's free writing methods by supplying a topic, I ask that they describe their writing problems by writing for twenty minutes without pause. The act of writing continuously proves crucial toward developing new patterns of awareness about writing; most students are surprised that they can generate two pages of prose. (Outside of class many would have fallen prey to old habits of anxiety.) The quick write has two immediate benefits: it makes discussion of common writing problems

much more open, linking a class of mavericks into a common pursuit, and it provides me with a writing sample replete with a full range of grammatical and organizational problems.

I ask each student to complete a protocol analysis on previous writing experiences. First the student reviews the writing of the previous quarter (all papers are kept on file by the English department) and identifies the most frequent error patterns. In a conference, the student's assessment of her previous work and my assessment of her most recent writing sample are compared (with striking agreement); together we set priorities and immediate goals, and I suggest a series of individualized exercises to overcome both the grammatical and the invention needs of the student (most did exercises in recursive observation and with various patterns of heuristic). This modified protocol discussion is a step towards student responsibility for her own errors and toward the development of an internalized standard of judgment.

The second part of the protocol analysis involves reading about three approaches to writing processes: "Peter Elbow's "Free Writing," Donald M. Murray's "The Maker's Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscripts," and Linda Flower's Problem Solving. Students are to apply these methods to their own writing strategies as they continue to evaluate their previous writing experiences. They are surprised to discover that they do have writing strategies. In journals, they free write on their habits of writing. Free writing seems to compel recognition of old habits (because it is a new technique to most of the students) and it offers the opportunity to try out some new writing processes:

I keep coming back to that and I'm going to stop

> or my teacher will think I'm some kind of looney . . . I noticed that I haven't put any punctuation marks on this paper yet. But I keep wanting to stop and go back and correct everything . . . I am beginning to see that maybe I'm in big trouble if I can't write without tearing up my first paper like I usually do. . . .

This student still is in fear of reprisals from the teacher. However, free-writing is an ungraded exercise, so risk taking becomes less worrisome and is actually liberating.

Some of Murray's ideas about revision are familiar to students, but they also learn that in revision is the potential for discovering new meaning. From both Elbow and Murray, students learn the power of selecting their best ideas and re-focusing these to provide a stronger draft. After considering Murray's ideas on revision, students recognize their tendency towards a verbal equivalent of "continental drift":

> I'll be doing great with my writing, it will just be flowing out of my head and then I'll go back and read it and it'll be totally off the subject, or I'll sit there and repeat myself or if I am writing an analysis of some sort, I'll start to paraphrase and then I'll have to cut out three-fourths of the whole thing and that makes me all flustered and I more or less have to start over.

This student has taken the first step toward discovering significance in her zero draft and building a developed idea from this firmer structure.

Flower's problem solving approach to writing introduces students to a consideration of purpose and audience. Although they already have done free writing on their writing habits, I ask them to complete Flower's sequence of questions about their writing processes. The response to this exercise is interesting. Although more complex in its comprehensiveness, Flower's outline of questions proves to be an easier way for students to analyze their writing methods, and indeed their responses are more coherent and less repetitive than their free writing on the same subject. On reflection, the class realizes that the outline in the form of questions provides a problem-solving situation for their writing. All feel that the method had proved its efficacy.

The most significant result of this first week of exposure to the writing process is student awareness that there <u>are</u> writing <u>processes</u> and that even a single assignment might at some phase involve all of them. In the various protocols of previous writing experiences, each student becomes articulate about her needs as a developing writer.

> I usually rely on a perfect-draft approach. It usually doesn't work very well. I usually . . . sit there and wait for ideas . . . then try to make that paragraph or sentence perfect before I go on. Writing is not an efficient process in which my time is in proportion to my intentions.

By setting up an individualized study program, each student makes a commitment to meeting those deficits in her writing skills in a way which seems reasonable to her. Students seem to realize that becoming self-critical gives them a sense of control over their writing processes. As this self-

awareness creates a more positive attitude toward writing, the stage is set for more significant involvement in writing as a reflection of thinking.

Other methods more common to many writing classrooms follow: with Trimble (Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing) and Flower (Problem Solving) as guides, students become aware of audience and purpose as part of the writing process. Creating theses which are precise and have an argumentative edge is a particular concern for these students who also need to read well, to select pertinent detail, and learn to generalize. The content for this course is poetry, and the initial focus of our literary analysis is diction. The remedial students had never before played with language; as they do, they come to appreciate its flexibility and its potential connotative range. As they gain an appreciation for relativity of meaning and the power of nuance, they also become more particular in their own use of words. I augment this awareness of language with the paramedic methods of Richard Lanham (Revising Prose).

Students keep a dialectical journal (following Ann Berthoff's models) by making a series of observations about the poems which are assigned (observations on the right side of the page; comments on the patterns of the observations, questions, and their own thinking on the left). At the end of each entry, students are asked to generate a thesis statement which reflects the tensions which they have discovered in the language of the poem. With much practice, they learn to generalize from specific and repeated observation and are able to pose a relationship between ideas and state a point of view with regard to each poem.

These theses statements are written on the board at the beginning of each class. During class discussion of the poems, we refer to the theses

and work with them (removing dead wood, struggling to predicate the essential relationship between ideas with an active verb, weighing each word). During class discussion, the student absorbs new ideas about the poem, and thus she is free to refine and enhance her statement, with the active support of the group, until her thought is accurately expressed in a dynamic statement.

Larger units of writing are also subject to peer scrutiny, first in small group readings of papers and guided with specific points for evaluation (thesis, cohesion, clarity), and then with drafts of longer essays in which each author reads her paper aloud and members of the class query the writer's intentions, support, conclusions, and language.

Central to the pedagogy of this remedial course is the students' shift from negative and dualistic notions about writing to a positive and relativistic awareness of the writing processes. The multiple choices which they can make as writers, the experience with free writing, problem solving, invention strategies, and revision make students more comfortable and creative in dealing with their own perceptions of inadequacy. They are also challenged to try new ways to meet their needs.

As students generate theses which are capable of controlling a developed thought, they are able to move into a kind of committed relativism about the writing process, able to select an idea central to their purpose and develop into a cogent essay because they have <u>selected</u> it and have made <u>conscious</u> choices. As students become able to take control of their writing processes, they begin to be dialectical thinkers, capable of perceptions that are multiple and recursive with regard to reading the poetry of the course capable of formulating arguable generalizations,

and of writing to an audience with clarity and completeness. Thus self-awareness of writing processes gives remedial students confidence and a tool for learning and developing intellectual maturity in other areas of knowledge as well.

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Note: Blythe Clinchy and Claire Zimmerman have been conducting studies on the Perry model as it applies to women students in both public and private institutions (Wellesley College, 1975).